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Progress towards the goal of education for all: the year 2000 Assessment

Interim report of the Secretary-General and of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Summary

The present interim report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 52/84 of 12 December 1997. As requested by the Assembly, the report examines the progress towards education for all, currently being reviewed by the ongoing Education for All (EFA) 2000 Assessment, and the feasibility and desirability of launching a United Nations decade to eradicate illiteracy. The final report will be submitted following the World Education Forum, April 2000.

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Introduction

1. In 1990, nations committed themselves to the goals of Education for All (EFA) and to ongoing assessment of their progress towards those goals. The Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All and Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs[1] covered six target dimensions: early childhood care and development, access to and completion of primary education, significant reduction in levels of illiteracy, particularly among women, improved learning achievement, provision of basic non-formal education and skills training for youth and adults and acquisition by families and individuals of the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to enhance the quality of their lives.

2. This commitment and resolve were reinforced in the recommendations made by all subsequent United Nations conferences of the 1990s, particularly the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 1992; the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 1994; the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 1995; and the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995. The importance of basic education for sustainable human development was forcefully reiterated in the report to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, 1996,[2] and the Hamburg Declaration on Adult Learning, adopted in July 1997 by the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V). Member States and non-governmental organizations were urged to promote the right to education for all and to create conditions for all for learning throughout life. In 1996, a mid-decade review was held in Amman at which some 70 countries presented their national reports regarding goals of EFA.

3. In 1997, the General Assembly, in its resolution 52/84 of 12 December 1997, requested the Secretary-General in cooperation with the Director-General of UNESCO and in consultation with Member States, to consider effective ways and means for achieving the goal of education for all, including the desirability and feasibility of launching a United Nations decade to eradicate illiteracy.

4. General Assembly resolution 52/84 is one of the principal directives that lend authority to the Education for All (EFA) 2000 Assessment exercise, launched under the auspices of the EFA Forum in 1997, following a joint decision by the Heads of UNESCO, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Bank. An intensive effort has been made by the Jomtien partner agencies to ensure that the EFA 2000 Assessment will mobilize all Member States and constitute not only a review of progress but also a renewal of goal-setting for the first decade of the twenty-first century. Much greater emphasis is now being placed on the presentation of disaggregated data (by gender, administrative level and so forth) that will facilitate in-country and regional educational planning processes. Case studies on literacy and non-formal education, thematic studies and special surveys on learning achievement and conditions of teaching/learning also form an integral part of the Assessment process.

Purposes and rationale of EFA Assessment 2000

5. Within the context of the many international conferences of the 1990s, the message includes the conviction that education is the cornerstone of social development, of achieving quality of life for individuals, economic prosperity, social cohesiveness in a diverse society, and values of peace and tolerance. It is related to key social issues such as poverty alleviation, equity (note particularly gender), population matters, health, nutrition and environment. Consequently, EFA Assessment 2000, as well as reviewing progress, has a focus on planning future policy initiatives, encompassing the progress and the challenges seen in early childhood education, primary education, learning achievement, literacy, essential skills and better living.

6. The EFA 2000 Assessment is very much concerned with improving the processes of consultation and participation in preparation of the report and planning the policies of education in the twenty-first century. Because of this, considerable emphasis has been placed on ownership of the report and its data by the Government concerned.

7. A Technical Advisory Group with members from the five Jomtien conveners, which was established at the international level, has compiled a list of 18 core EFA indicators and other, more qualitative means of reviewing EFA progress. It has also established an implementation mechanism which foresaw individual country reports as the cornerstone of the Assessment process, leading to regional syntheses of progress and future goal-setting. More than 160 national EFA Assessment 2000 coordinators have been named, and 10 regional technical advisory groups (RTAGs) have been constituted.

8. There will clearly be a huge demand, in the information age of the twenty-first century, for international agencies to assist countries, particularly their education communities, in improving their level of ease concerning collecting, processing and interpreting quantitative data. The EFA Forum secretariat has had to stress that any one indicator needs to be interpreted in relation to others, rather than in isolated stand-alone fasnion.

Advocacy and information

9. Since September 1998, the EFA Forum secretariat has published several issues of the *EFA Newsflash*, a special information service for professionals involved in the EFA 2000 Assessment. Moreover, all relevant information concerning the Assessment is available on the Forum's Web site.

10. A more comprehensive media strategy for the EFA 2000 Assessment and the World Education Forum is currently in the making. The strategy will consist of two phases. The first phase (September 1999–January 2000) will mainly focus on the EFA 2000 Assessment at the regional level, as well as the regional EFA meetings. The RTAGs are key actors in carrying out this first phase, whose aim is to mobilize the media at regional and national level. The Forum secretariat will be in charge of the second phase (February–April 2000). This phase will increasingly focus on mobilizing leaders of world opinion and the world media for the World Education Forum.

Upcoming events

11. RTAGs are now beginning to plan actively for the regional education meetings which will be held for the most part in the months of December 1999 and January 2000. Most of the donor community have rightly insisted that the EFA Assessment 2000 should focus on regional concerns, while not denying the need for a global synthesis. At present, regional education forum meetings are foreseen in five regions.

World Education Forum (Senegal, April 2000)

12. This global event will be the culmination point of the EFA 2000 Assessment. The World Education Forum will receive a global synthesis report based on the results of the EFA 2000 Assessment, together with the findings and recommendations of the previously held regional EFA meetings. Based on an examination of these documents, the Forum will adopt an Agenda for Education in the Twenty-first Century. This Agenda, the immediate outcome of the World Education Forum, will be disseminated very widely in different languages, and communicated to the several United Nations development conferences scheduled for later in the year 2000.

United Nations Decade to eradicate Illiteracy

13. The ongoing EFA 2000 Assessment will shed light on the achievements in the field of literacy around the world. Parallel to this extensive exercise, several efforts have already been carried out to evaluate the Major Project on Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, the UNESCO-led Action Plan for the Eradication of Illiteracy by the Year 2000, the Asia and Pacific programme of Education for All and Literacy (APPEAL) and the corresponding regional programmes in Africa and the Arab States. Renewed efforts are being made to understand both individual acquisition of literacy and societal literacy. More recently, the Seventh Conference of Ministers of Education of African Member States (MINEDAF VII), Durban, 1998, and the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) at its sixty-eighth ordinary session (Ouagadougou, 1998) enthusiastically endorsed the recommendation made by CONFINTEA V to launch an African Paolo Freire Literacy Decade in the framework of the Decade of Education in Africa.

14. The demand for literacy has increased drastically in recent years. The number of literate people has been considerably augmented, though unequally and at different paces, with different intensities. The number of people made literate in the world has increased from 1 billion to 3.3 billion during the last four decades. There are today 4.2 billion literate people, representing more than two thirds of today's population and almost the entire world population in 1970. Unfortunately, there are still an estimated 875 million illiterate people in the world. This figure is as impressive as it is disturbing.

Advocacy for a literacy decade

15. The review of experiences clearly shows that literacy is a topical issue and a useful tool, a generic and portable

competence with which to equip individuals, communities and nations to solve current problems and face emerging challenges. However, a literate world is more than the sum of literate societies, which in turn is more than the simple addition of literate individuals. A literate world is not only about learning but also — and mainly — about living.

16. It is evident that an understanding of literacy as set forth above has major implications for policies and actions. Such an understanding not only recognizes the need for, and importance of, literacy for sustainable livelihood and development but also compels us to depart from the firm and long-standing assumption that "by targeting literacy programmes on the illiterates of the world, we shall create a literate world". Experience shows that programmes that have a lasting and sustainable impact are embedded in social transformation processes that require literacy skills and competences. A literacy decade is indeed needed, though with the aim not of "eradicating illiteracy" but rather of creating a literate world where societies and individuals promote their own literacy projects. The advantage of such an approach is the recognition and appreciation of local cultures and practices and the proactive identification and impulsion of development processes and social movements that are literacy-demanding and socially rooted.

Notes

[1] See *Final Report of the World Conference on Education for All: Meeting Basic Learning Needs, Jomtien, Thailand, 5–9 March 1990*, Inter-agency Commission (United Nations Development Programme; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; United Nations Children's Fund; World Bank) for the World Conference on Education for All, New York, 1990.

[2] *Learning: The Treasure Within* (Paris, UNESCO, 1996).

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Economic and environmental questions:
sustainable development

SECURITY COUNCIL
Fifty-fourth year

Letter dated 4 June 1999 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to forward, enclosed herewith, a letter from Jagos Zelenovic, Federal Minister for Development, Science and Environment, addressed to Klaus Toepler, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme, relative to the consequences of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization aggression on the environment in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Economic and Social Council, under item 13 (a) of the provisional agenda of its 1999 regular session, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Vladislav JOVANOVIC
Chargé d'affaires a.i.

* E/1999/100 and Add.1.

Annex

Letter from the Federal Minister for Development, Science and Environment addressed to the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme

I would like to remind you of the letter dated 18 April 1999, addressed to you by Zivadin Jovanovic, Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and on this occasion I wish once again to alert you and the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development to the environmental consequences inflicted by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) aggression against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Since 24 March 1999, NATO has been severely bombing the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, without any international legal basis, real pretext and consensus of the United Nations Security Council.

The NATO aggression on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has caused an economic, humanitarian, health as well as environmental catastrophe.

The aggressor's daily targets are national parks, nature reservations, monuments of cultural and natural heritage, rare and protected plants and animal species, among which are those of international importance. Even the cultural and historical monuments, which are in the World Heritage List, are not being spared, as well as the world biosphere reservation and wetlands of international importance.

Besides carrying out genocide, NATO by its aggression is causing ecocide in the environment of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and wider, in the whole Balkans and a considerable part of Europe. The real ecological catastrophe is going on in the heart of Europe with unforeseeable time and space range.

With daily attacks on the chemical industry and electrical power plants, the NATO forces have caused numerous technological, chemical and industrial accidents throughout Yugoslavia, with wide local consequences and will all elements of transboundary environmental catastrophe. Permanent bombing has caused numerous explosions, swift uncontrolled spreading, spilling, evaporating and sublimating of huge quantities of highly toxic substances, as well as burning, combustion and incomplete combustion of inflammable materials. Large quantities of substances with carcinogenic, allergenic, teratogenic, mutagenic, toxic and other dangerous characteristics with negative consequences for people, plants and animals have been emitted into the environment.

Destruction of chemical industry plants presents a special form of chemical war. In order to illustrate this, a few typical examples are given below:

(a) Large quantities of dangerous and harmful substances have been dispersed: chlorine, chloro-carbon hydride, ammonia, benzene and vinyl-chloride, with the concentration in the air in some places reaching values of several hundred and more than a few thousand times higher than the allowed maximum;

(b) Incomplete combustion of inflammable fuel has caused the emission of a huge quantity of carbon-monoxide, nitrogen and sulphur oxides, carcinogenic polycyclic carbon-hydride and soot;

(c) There is a danger that bombing of the chemical industry plants could cause spillage of highly toxic mercury, which is used in certain technological processes;

(d) Thousands of tons of oil and oil derivatives, acids and alkalis have leaked into the rivers, effecting and, in some locations, destroying aquatic flora and fauna;

(e) Thousands of tons of oil have leaked into the Danube, the most important European river, thus destroying and endangering in the long term flora and fauna, as well as the water supply for large numbers of people in several countries;

(f) Heavily damaged electric power transformer stations released pyralene oils - only one litre of spilt oil can pollute one billion litres of water;

(g) Certain quantities of heavy metals were also spread into some water flows.

Chemical compound emissions following bomb and missile explosions are extremely dangerous, as well as fires resulting from building destruction, including surrounding forest, all being important ecosystem components. Bearing in mind that the NATO aggressor uses the banned cluster bombs, the endangered areas cover a vast region.

Many forest complexes, national parks and orchards were damaged by bombing, by cluster bombs in particular. Large forest areas were damaged in the fire, trunks were damaged and destroyed, thus devastating forests and contaminating the forest soil. Owing to fossil fuel combustion a great quantity of harmful gases were emitted in the air with adverse influence on forest death.

NATO uses in its aggression on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia banned genocide weapons, ammunition with radioactive charges. It has been proved that A10 warplanes use ammunition with depleted uranium. Uranium oxide particles with micro dimension and in the form of mobile aerosol are spread widely by air circulation. The depleted uranium has a semi-disintegration time of several hundred million years; actually its effect is everlasting. If it is inhaled, this radioactive and highly toxic material cannot be removed from lungs, thus enlarging its toxic and carcinogenic effects.

Vast distraction was caused by soft graphite bombs several times breaking down the electric power system with unforeseeable humanitarian and environmental consequences.

The NATO aggression on Yugoslavia contains essential elements of ecocide. Numerous specially valuable habitats of flora and fauna and vulnerable ecosystems were polluted and/or degraded by dangerous eco-toxic materials. Fresh water flows and underground waters have been polluted, and the air

pollution has endangered a vast area, causing long-term soil pollution and endangering agricultural and forest areas, leading to an unforeseeable endangering of biodiversity. Destroyed bridges slow down the water flow and flood up-stream regions. A slow-down of the Danube flow at Novi Sad has already caused flooding of cultivated land, and there is a threat of flooding of settlements.

Regarding the NATO threats of bombing of oil and chemical industry plants, which could be considered as "chemical bombs", and bearing in mind danger to the environment at local and transboundary level, preventive security measures have been undertaken (evacuation, dislocation etc.).

NATO is constantly carrying out war activities in the vicinity of the Institute of Nuclear Sciences Vinca in the Belgrade suburbs. The Institute performs only scientific and research activities related to peaceful conditions. If the international community does not prevent these attacks, an environmental crime will happen with unforeseeable consequences. Man's right to safe and healthy environment is endangered by the NATO aggression. As a result of this, numerous basic human rights are violated, including the right to life and health, as well as other basic human rights and freedom (the right to development, work, education, movement, freedom of thought etc.).

Numerous international documents have been severely violated by the unprovoked and illegal NATO aggression: the Charter of the United Nations, the humanitarian law provisions, especially the Geneva Conventions with the related protocols, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, provisions of international agreement in the field of the environment, as well as the basic proclaimed principles of environmental protection.

Within the framework of the violated international agreements in the field of the environment, particular attention is drawn to the following conventions: the Convention on Cooperation for the Protection and Sustainable Use of the Danube River, Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes, the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea against Pollution, the Convention on the Transboundary Pollution of the Atmosphere, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, the Ramsar Convention, the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, the Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals and the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal.

The following conventions related to environmental protection during the war conflicts have been violated: the Convention on the Banning of Military or any other Adverse Technology Affecting the Environment, the Convention on Protection of Cultural Heritage in the Case of War Conflicts, the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on their Destruction, and the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their Destruction, etc.

The member States of NATO have also violated the principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992, and in particular principle 24: "Warfare is inherently destructive to sustainable development. States shall therefore respect international law providing protection for the environment in times of armed conflict and cooperate in its further development as necessary", as well as principle 25: "Peace, development and environmental protection are interdependent and indivisible".

Bearing in mind the above, and respecting the consistent peace policy carried out by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, we consider it is imperative to immediately cease all war activities and seek a peaceful solution to the existing problems and to start rehabilitation and reconstruction as soon as possible.

(Signed) Jagos ZELENOVIC
Minister in the Federal Government